

Exploring the Muslim Canadian Environmental Philanthropy Narrative

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Abstract

Climate changes are happening at an unprecedented rate, as identified in the 2021 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Environmental philanthropy, those acts of contributions toward the conservation and preservation of the environment, need to be better understood, as research suggests there is insufficient literature in this area. For Muslims living in Canada, the concept of charity, khalifa (a sacred entrustment whereby Muslims strive to support and preserve all of the Earth and what is in it), and worship take root and have developed within a context of immigration, identity formation, and broader Canadian contexts. The Muslim Canadian identity is informed by the social, political, economic, and historical elements of the Muslim Canadian experience. In turn, this informs the Muslim Canadian environmental philanthropy narrative. This paper explores the relationship between Islam, eco-consciousness, and its manifestations in environmental philanthropy in Canada and how this is informing the climate change crisis. Centered on the narratives of ten Muslim Canadians currently leading and involved with environmental philanthropy, the paper also offers insight on future considerations for environmental philanthropy within the Muslim Canadian context.

Keywords: *Muslim Canadian, environmental philanthropy, khalifa, charity, eco-consciousness, climate change*

Introduction

Environmental philanthropy needs greater attention and prioritization by all Canadians. The 2021 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report states that “Human influence has warmed the climate at a rate that is unprecedented in at least the last 2000 years” (MassonDelmotte et al., 2021, p. 7). Through an article published in *BioScience Journal* in 2021, 11,000 scientists from 153 countries around the world made a declaration of climate emergency: “[t]he climate crisis has arrived and is accelerating faster than most scientists

expected. It is more severe than anticipated, threatening natural ecosystems and the fate of humanity,” the statement read (Ripple et al., 2021, p. 894).

Based on the works of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMP) and the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) and Red Crescent Societies, a six-month period from September 2020 to February 2021 indicates that of the 12.6 million people from around the world who have become internally displaced, 80% of them (IDMP, 2021), approximately 10.3 million, have been forcefully displaced due to climate change-induced disasters (Kapoor, 2021). The IFRC report states that “climate change is expected to amplify the existing challenges associated with disaster displacement...” (2020, p. 1). Scientists predict a 50% increase in these displacement figures for every degree of global warming experienced (Kam et al., 2021). Human displacement and increased political border stress, food water and resource depletion, increased frequency, and severity of disease outbreak are all climate change impacts that will increasingly impact citizens of the Earth (Podesta, 2019).

Mitigating the climate change crisis is becoming an increasingly pressing issue. Environmental philanthropy is an important part of the climate change crisis discourse. *Environmental Philanthropy* can be defined by the acts of contributions toward the preservation or conservation of nature and the promotion of activities that benefit the general health of the planet by individuals, communities, NGOs, and institutions (Ramutsindela et al., 2013; Greenspan et al., 2012; Ivany, 2020). Factors including values, knowledge, political orientation, and sociodemographic variables impact behaviors of environmental philanthropy (Greenspan et al., 2012). Religion can also play a mediating role in human-earthly relations and thus influence philanthropic behaviors (Greeley, 1993; Herva, 2006; Ramutsindela et al., 2013).

Research shows there is currently very limited literature and analysis on environmental philanthropy as a behavior (Greenspan et al., 2012; Katz-Gerro et al., 2015). There is also an absence of a unified theoretical concept of philanthropy within the literature and thus terms like philanthropy, charity, giving, donation, and volunteerism have often been used interchangeably (Ramutsindela et al., 2013, p. 5). A report on environmental charities in Canada by Charity Intelligence Canada makes two recommendations for improving environmental charity outcomes: projects that can engage the community in committing to environmentally sustainable practices and long-term research that can inform plans to improve environmental practices (Grandy, 2013). Other research suggests there is a recent emergence of grassroots efforts led by not-for-profit and charitable organizations in mitigating environmental concerns (Ivany, 2020).

While Dilmagani (2011, 2019) writes about the religion, wealth, and practices of charity among Muslims in Canada, and Alterman (2004) has written about the philanthropic practices of Muslims in America, currently, there is no literature available on the environmental behaviors of Muslims in Canada. As an extension of a wider study that explores the personal narratives of over 60 Muslim women globally and their practices of environmental activism, this paper focuses on the development of environmental philanthropy among Muslims in Canada.

Looking at societies where Muslims live as minority citizens, their practices of environmental philanthropy evolve through a unique trajectory that is coupled with the realities of establishing a presence as minority citizens of a state. This paper will explore this trajectory within the Canadian context, investigating how environmental philanthropy has developed among Muslim Canadians and explore recommendations for next steps within the coming years.

This paper will explore (1) the relationship between Islam and eco-consciousness, (2) provide a context for understanding how Muslims in Canada are responding to the climate change crisis, and (3) provide insight on future considerations for environmental philanthropy within the Muslim Canadian context. This article will add to the currently emerging body of inter-epistemological literature on climate change and diverse communities both in Canada and globally. The recommendations from this paper offer some tangible steps for not just Muslims but all Canadians on how to respond to the climate change crisis from a grassroots, diverse community engagement perspective.

Method and Research Design

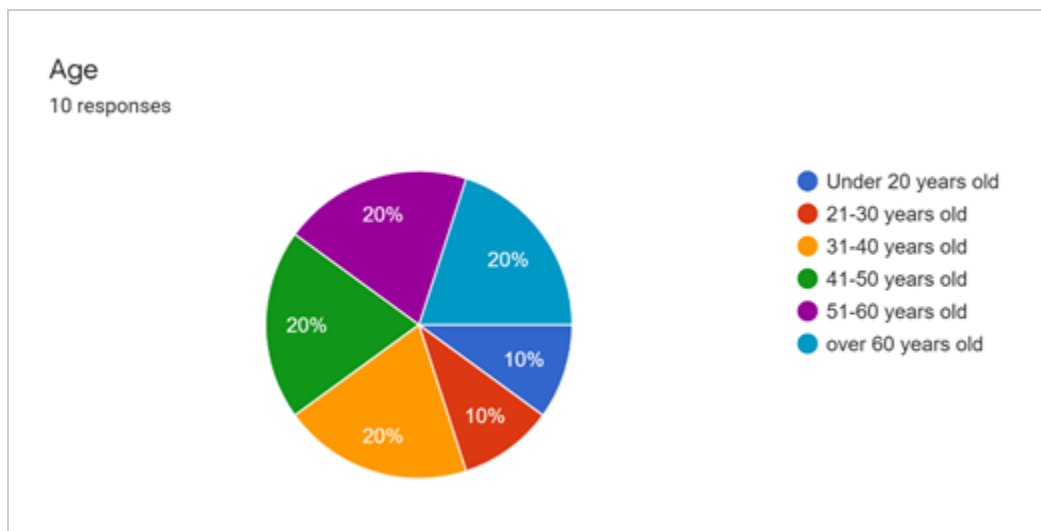
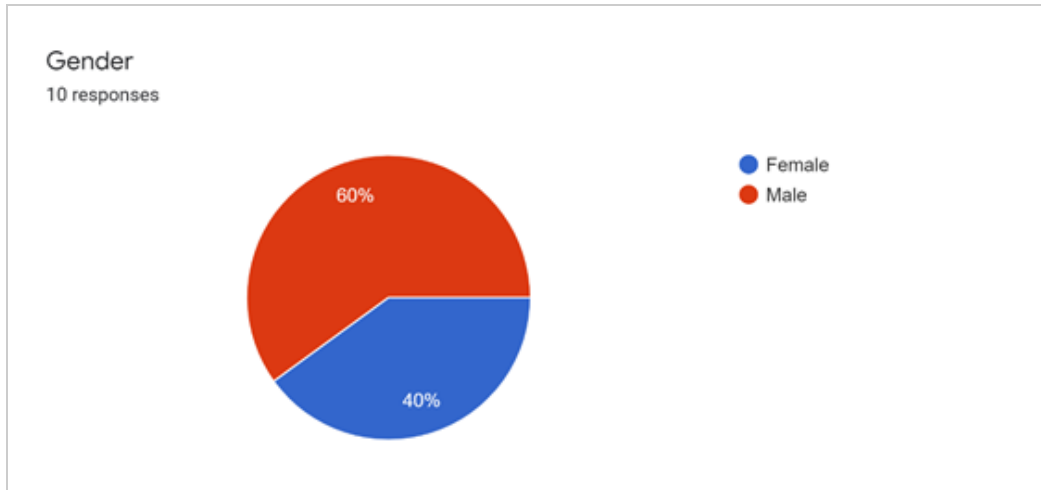
To understand current Muslim Canadian practices and perspectives on environmental philanthropy, a qualitative method that enables opportunities to build rapport and afford flexibility for both the participant and researcher to engage in dialogue was used. The research was designed using a semi-structured interview process. Semi-structured interviews permit a data collection methodology where key informants can share personal experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs as related to a topic (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019, p. 2). Semi-structured interviews help gain understanding about the respondent's beliefs, perceptions, and personal accounts regarding a topic, thus giving a researcher flexibility. Principles of connectivity, humanness, and empathy are a consideration in building authentic and dialogical semi-structured interviews (Brown & Danaher, 2019, p. 76).

While engaging in interviews, it was important to establish comfort and ensure participants understood how the interview would take place for the purpose of research. It was also important to support the flow of each participant's narrative, attend to the nuances within the narrative, explore responses based on what the participant offered, invite additional thoughts, and express appreciation to the participant for their important contribution to this research. Ethical considerations for semi-structured interview processes usually incorporate respect, sensitivity, and consideration of the power imbalance between the researcher and participant, where participants are part of a process that often requires them to reveal sensitive and personal information (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019, p. 4). To this end, interview questions for the wider research and process were developed with a holistic ethical focus: a means of questioning that was respectful for the interviewer, as well as the topic of the Earth and the Islamic context. Interviewees were provided with an overview of the research and objectives, along with verbal and written consent attained for voluntary participation and use of their name within this research.

Following the semi-structured methodology, interviews were conducted in a dialogue between the researcher and participant, guided by questions and flexibility incorporated through follow-up questions, probes, and comments (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019, p. 1). Interviews were conducted through one-to-one video-conferencing methods where participant and researcher could see one another and reciprocate nonverbal communication cues. The researcher aimed to maintain contact and provide means for rapport building both through verbal and nonverbal cues during the interviews. Questions were divided into four general categories: grand tour questions aimed at getting a general overview of the participant and their areas of experiences in environmental philanthropy; core questions that were the basis of understanding information pertaining to environmental philanthropy both with relationship to Qur'anic concepts and within the Canadian Islamic context; planned follow-up questions, such as what they feel next steps in environmental philanthropy should be; and unplanned follow-up questions based on gaining a better understanding of a point an interviewee was making (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019, p. 5). Participant interviews lasted anywhere from half an hour to one hour. There was a relational focus embedded within the interviews that emphasized active engagement and curiosity (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019, p. 1).

Interviews were conducted with 10 individuals. A synopsis of the organizations and individuals interviewed can be found in the appendix. To access interviewees, as per the semi-structured interview process, some parameters were considered, e.g., good interviewees are available, willing to be interviewed, and have lived experiences and knowledge about the topic of interest (Whiting, 2008). There was a specific aim to attain perspectives from a variety of environmentally based initiatives, including grassroots events, institution-based initiatives, grant-providing initiatives, youth-based initiatives, and Indigenous relations-based initiatives. There was also consideration in incorporating gender diversity as well as individuals who are of first, second, and possibly third generation Muslim Canadians, individuals who represent diverse ethnic backgrounds, and individuals who represent diverse interpretations of Islam.

Ten individuals were interviewed, and the following are some demographic breakdowns, based on information from a questionnaire given to the interviewees.



Where first-generation Canadian is defined as someone born outside of Canada, second-generation Canadian is defined as someone born in Canada and having at least one parent born outside of Canada, and third generation is defined as someone who is born in Canada with both parents also being born in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011).

- 8/10 (80%) of the respondents were first-generation Canadians, and
- 2/10 (20%) of the respondents were second-generation Canadians

It should be noted that one participant who identified as first generation was born in the United States.

This process was reviewed as part of the wider research project, through a group of academics, practitioners, community stakeholders, and professionals who specialize in areas of Islamic psychology, Islam and gender studies, global

human rights, global political Islam, ecopsychology, critical policy, equity and leadership studies, religion and politics, Indigenous women and the arts, and eco-art therapy. Feedback was incorporated to develop a research framework and process that could take into consideration the different layers of the wider research framework.

A thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and interpret the major ideas, themes, and anomalies that came through these interviews (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Thematic analysis provides a means of examining the ways that people make meaning out of their experiences and how they construct their social realities through meaning making as informed by their material experiences and contexts (Evans, 2018, p. 2). Through a process of analysis and reviewing what patterns and themes arose through this particular set of interviews (Evans, 2018, p. 5), relating this back to the initial themes behind the questions, and then interrogation, a thematic analysis was initiated. Data interrogation also involved moving from describing the data and what people are saying to reflecting on underlying assumptions, ideas, and threading this alongside wider societal contexts (Evans, 2018, p. 5). Thematic analysis around the spheres of environmental activism of Muslims in Canada and how these experiences were interrelated as well as unique started to emerge. This analysis led to identifying recommendations for future considerations within practices of environmental philanthropy among Muslim communities in Canada that form part of the conclusion.

Key Concepts

This section introduces the four key concepts related to environmental philanthropy that underpin the analysis: Islamic eco-consciousness, environmental philanthropy, endowments, or *waqf*, and the concept of a *khalifa* in Islam. These concepts will be defined as well as explored in relation to the premise of this research.

Islamic Eco-Consciousness

Muslims are linked to each other through their acts of worship. Philanthropic practices bind Muslims to one another (Alterman & Hunter, 2004, p. 4) as well as to other living beings within the Earth. In the Qur'an, there is a verse that is translated from Arabic by scholars as:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَائِفَ

“And it is He (Allah) who has made you viceregents on the Earth...”
(Qur'an, 6:165)

The word *khalifa* expressed in the Qur'an indicates how Allah places the Earth as a sacred responsibility entrusted on humans, which makes them *khalifa* on the Earth (Hossain, 2020). Muslims must act and live on this Earth with a consciousness of this responsibility of being a *khalifa* (Muhammad et al., 2010, p. 19). Upholding the sacred responsibility of *khalifa* to the Earth is intricately connected to acts of charity, or philanthropy, as well as environmental activism. It is narrated in a *hadith* that the Prophet (pbuh) was witnessed to have said:

If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a *sadaqah* for that person who has planted or sowed it (Narrated Sahih Bukhari, Book 41, Hadith #1, Sunnah.com, n.d., #2320).

Environmental philanthropy is a means to fulfilling the role of a *khalifah*. For the purposes of this paper, environmental philanthropy refers to the giving of time or money or volunteering or donating in support of environmental issues through nongovernmental initiatives and organizations (Greenspan et al., 2012, pp.111–112). How Muslims make meaning of philanthropy and adopt the concept of philanthropy itself is an important precursor to understanding the practices of environmental philanthropy.

And finally, *waqf*, which is part of one's worship of Allah in that it is connected to upholding an economy based on a sacred trust (Moumtaz, 2021). Upholding a sacred trust is reflected in respectfully living in an interconnected system of support with the Earth. Climate change is an issue that is given high priority within the Qur'an. From the very first page of the Qur'an (see verse below), it speaks about the importance of rectification instead of causing corruption on the Earth. It is important to spread awareness on how central this is to the understanding of Islam (2021):

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ

And when it is said to them, do not cause corruption on the Earth...
(Qur'an, 2:11)

Environmental philanthropy has existed within the tradition of Islam for centuries. It has historically been found within the *waqf* system of Islamic societies. A *waqf* is a system of endowment or "Islamic trust" (Kuran, 2001, p. 842). Once the property is created, a *waqf* permanently belongs to Allah and any revenues that are generated from a *waqf* property must be channeled to its beneficiaries (Baqtayan et al., 2018, p. 149). Records show many *waqf* endowments were allocated for environmental purposes. The traditions of the Prophet (pbuh) supported these acts. In the early periods of Islamic civilizations, *waqf* endowments supported different aspects of a society's needs. From an environmental perspective, some of these needs included food provision for

livestock, supporting agricultural sectors (Baqutayan, 2018, p. 149), gardens and groves, veterinary services, and animal fountains (Abdurrashid, 2020, p. 15).

The Muslim Canadian Context in Shaping Environmental Philanthropy

In the context of environmental philanthropy, factors of immigration and integration must be considered when looking at the practices of environmental philanthropy among the Muslim Canadian community. Muslims comprise 3.2% of the total Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2017). Muslim Canadians are the largest non-Christian religious minority in Canada, and their largest proportion is representative of recent immigrants (Connor, 2014). Being recent immigrants might imply that they are in the beginning stages of an integration process (Kazemipur, 2014). As environmental philanthropic practises require a certain degree of financial stability, based on wealth accumulation and access to disposable cash, immigrant Muslim communities may find themselves in a position to prioritize areas of need when donating to causes around. Even if the community sees the inherent value in investing their time and money in environmental philanthropic efforts, priorities of integration may be a prerequisite. As the summary of organizations and individuals above show, there are now developments in environmental philanthropy among Muslims in Canada.

Part of that integration and developing of identity within a new host society is also dependent on what systems of inclusion exist within the nature-related discourse in the wider society (Matulis et al., 2016, p. 289). That is, the opportunities to access and engage with, contemplate on, and act with non-Muslims regarding issues of the environment. How does society include marginalized views of conservation that hold different narratives? (Matulis et al., 2016, p. 289). Studies show that even within academia, there are gaps in stories and experiences of marginalized communities on how to enter and navigate environmental and conservation fields (Bailey et al., 2020, p. 1294). Feelings of loneliness, isolation, and cultural taxation are realities for minority communities who try to enter fields of environmentalism and conservation (Bailey, et al., 2020, p. 1294). Consider how long Indigenous views have been ignored, though recently some work is developing on redressing this through the Indigenous Guardianship system and the work on *Reconciling Ways of Knowing*. The Indigenous Guardianship system which may also be referred by names such as Stewards, Rangers, or Watchpeople, helps to develop systems of natural resource management with Indigenous community engagement and management in planning and monitoring territories by connecting Indigenous traditional knowledge systems with Western science and technology methodologies to create adaptive and lasting means of environmental management (Watt, 2021). Additionally, *Reconciling Ways of Knowing* is focused on bridging Indigenous knowledge and science through relationship building between Indigenous knowledge keepers and scientists to support transformations in environmental stewardship approaches and solutions (David Suzuki Foundation, 2021).

Related to environmental philanthropy are the opportunities available or means of supporting environmental engagement for a group of people to be in nature and connect with nature. Researchers have shown that firsthand

opportunities to connect with the Earth and develop an identity in relation to nature is a predictor of environmental activism (Mackay et al., 2021). Scott (2018) writes about the “long history of visual apartheid in the advertising of the outdoors industry.” She analyzes the absence of marginalized people in marketing materials of outdoor activities (Scott, 2018). When marginalized, immigrant communities are not part of the discourses of “nature,” it adds an additional layer of navigation and efforts to connect. For the Muslim community in Canada, this factor must be considered in regard to their practices of environmental philanthropy.

Hence, practices of environmental philanthropy and upholding the sacred responsibility of a *khalifa* and “acting according to the will of God and take care of the earth as He wishes” (Ouis, 1998, p.154) takes root and develops within a context of marginalization, immigration, identity formation, and distribution of time and money. It is informed by the Muslim Canadian identity narrative. That is, the social, political, economic, and historical elements of the Muslim-Canadian experience.

Discussion of Interview Themes

This section includes brief summaries of themes that arose as part of the thematic analysis of the interviews. Brief descriptions of the individuals and organizations are provided within this discussion, however Appendix A provides further details on the individuals as well as organizations.

Building Awareness

When participants were asked about the concept of charity in Islam as it relates to environmental philanthropy among Muslim Canadians, the overarching theme was an identified slow shift in mindset. Participants unanimously commented on environmental philanthropy not being prioritized within the top areas of focus within the Muslim community. However, the reasons why they felt it was not prioritized varied.

Several participants commented on how Muslims in Canada connect access to natural resources to the part of their faith that drives them to then reflect on nature and honor and protect it, in accordance with their faith. Muaz Nasir, who is a business management analyst with the City of Toronto’s water department as well as the cofounder of Khaleafa (see Appendix A), acknowledges how Muslims make connections to the Qur’anic verses that mention the bounties of nature, describe rivers flowing, which they may not have experienced in abundance from their country of origin, but can experience in Canada, and thus reflect more deeply through such experiences in Canada. Jana Jandal Alrifai is a 17-year-old high school student and youth climate activist serving as the vice-president of the Windsor-Essex Youth Climate Council (see Appendix A) who immigrated to Canada at a young age from Syria with her family. Jana’s family’s personal experiences support Muaz’s observations on Muslims making connections to nature in Canada. Jana describes how she and her family go to parks and conservation areas. She describes how “the landscape in Canada is so

vast and when you see how vast and beautiful this place is, you feel that you need to protect it.” Jasser Auda, a Canadian Islamic scholar of legal theory who serves on several councils of Islamic scholars, (see Appendix A) contextualizes Muaz’s and Jana’s perspectives within the Islamic tradition by commenting about how resource depletion and the impact that Canadians have on natural resources in Canada is an issue that Muslims should be concerned about because Islam guides Muslims to be conscious of the rights of the Earth.

Aadil Nathani is a lawyer and a cofounder of Green Ummah who is currently serving on its board of directors (see Appendix A). Aadil observes that people are starting to shift and give more toward environmental causes. Nathani identifies two groups of donors. First, there are those that adhere to a “if you’re not going or giving towards the mosque, your efforts are not going for Allah” approach. Secondly, there is a group that has started to give to advocacy and activism causes now, he says, and that is a recent shift. Muaz Nasir also affirms Aadil’s observations, as both are seeing that Muslims are increasingly recognizing the importance of connecting with philanthropical organizations that are involved in environmental activities.

Attitudes toward the kind of philanthropic work that an organization undertakes is directly related to how they are able to raise funds to cover operating costs. One related limitation to newly developing environmental organizations is the inability to process tax receipts for donations. While an organization can register and be incorporated (Government of Canada, n.d.), it must apply to receive nonprofit and charity status, which enables tax receipt issuance (Government of Canada, n.d.). While EnviroMuslims launched in 2019 and Green Ummah launched in 2020, they are fairly new organizations, and both raised the thought that the viability of receiving donations *may* sometimes influence donor decisions. Thus, not being able to issue a tax receipt may act as a limitation at times.

This means that, at the time of this research, all the individuals and organizations interviewed, except for the Muslim Association of Canada (MAC), which is an older organization, having been established in 1997 (see Appendix A), verified that they are entirely run through volunteers and any donations or grant money received are used toward the purchase of materials, specified services like printing or technical platforms, or contract-based tasks. This indicates that the human resources allocated toward Muslim Canadian initiatives in environmental philanthropy are currently being run almost entirely on volunteered time, which no doubt affects the ability to organize and promote environment-related campaigns.

Most participants commented on the importance of the role of Muslim leaders. They expressed a need for leaders within the Muslim community to provide messages and contextualizing environmental practices within an Islamic framework. This will help members of the Muslim community to understand and encourage them to adopt these practices.

Shelina Jessa, who has been volunteering with the Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat of Toronto for several years and currently serves on the board of directors for the Eco Committee (see Appendix A), described the work to educate

community members using Islamic perspectives, which took several years of gradual effort. This included starting with a group of volunteers and participants that were more cooperative and then incorporating competitions and fun components as well. Jessa describes how, as the efforts of the committee grew, there was recognition from the wider Muslim and non-Muslim community, including the York Region Sustainability Award in 2019 (Climate Wise Business Network, 2019). This led to a sense of pride among the community and greater interest in pursuing these efforts.

Areej Riaz of EnviroMuslims, who completed her master's in applied carbon management and is a professional environmental consultant, and Nadia Mohammed of EnviroMuslims, who holds an MBA and works in environmental project coordination and also volunteers with EnviroMuslims, speak of the importance of initiatives that can address the diversity within the Muslim community—this includes ethnic, generational, and social diversities. “Not everybody speaks the same language, and there are multi-generation gatherings at events. During an event at the mosque, getting signage and information across about recycling, composting and other sustainable practices is complex,” remarks Nadia Mohammed. Areej Riaz discussed one of EnviroMuslims' current projects, which is developing a “how-to” series on how members of the Muslim community can engage in more sustainable practices within their homes and lives, such as how to make an herb garden, build a compost pile at home, and how to have climate change conversations with your kids. While such resources may already exist online, Areej clarifies why “it is important to have your own community and your own Canadian Muslim community represented in sharing expertise and knowledge transfer.” She notes how there is an increase in the ability to impact change when the people delivering the message “look like you and talk like you and are doing these things.” Muaz Nasir, who has been leading the Green Khutbah campaign, says these messages of sustainable practices within Islam are not new, however they need to be packaged into “speakeable” points that the community can easily connect with and apply to their lives.

As participants discussed themes of building awareness, anfevery single participant agreed that while environmental philanthropy is deeply embedded within Islamic teachings, they felt there needs to be a significant focus on bringing these teachings to the forefront and further engaging with the Muslim community.

Intergenerational Work

Participants were asked to describe the relationship between the Muslim Canadian identity and environmental philanthropy. Participants often described differences between first- and second-generation Muslims living in Canada and how they identify with practices of environmental philanthropy. Areej Riaz of EnviroMuslims describes how any new immigrant feels a duty to integrate, however for a Muslim, there is an “added burden of coming from a faith that doesn't necessarily get the response that other faith-groups get, and so Muslim Canadians want to integrate as soon and as deeply as possible within the Canadian faction.” Muaz Nasir from Khaleafa observes how as newcomers, Muslims often

come from countries with limited natural resources and then when they come to Canada, they experience vast natural resources, an environment with clean air and clean water and their identity becomes a “balancing of two identities—that of resource availability vs. that of resource scarcity.” This means that some may be inclined to overconsumption of resources given the newly discovered abundance, or a consciousness of resource consumption because they become aware of the scarcity of resources within their country of origin.

Muneeb Nasir who is the chair of the Olive Tree Foundation (see Appendix A) and a retired senior analyst at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, Canada, recognizes that contemporary circumstances may have pushed Muslims in Canada to lose focus of the universality of Islam. “We feel we have to protect our Islam.... However, the more we connect with wider communities and wider issues, the better we can protect ourselves and our society,” he mentions. Muslims in Canada have been targeted and victimized at the hands of Islamophobia (Mankani, 2021), and this is part of a globally rising issue where the UN has recently reported that “anti-Muslim hatred has rise[n] to epidemic proportions” (Shadeed, 2021). This has prompted Muslims to react with an urgency to protect their Islam, as per Muneeb Nasir. However, he asserts that Islam is more comprehensive and universal than the minimalistic characteristics ascribed by current realities. By connecting with wider issues, such as the environment and climate change, where Islam does have a role and offers perspectives, and by being part of a broader context, Muslims can embrace a more universal and holistic identity that is inherent within Islam and thus normalize their identity by participating in various issues. This would inherently become a form of positively strengthening the Islamic identity in society. Adding to Muneeb Nasir’s point on protection and insecurity, Aadil Nathani from Green Ummah shares that “we’re still very close to 9/11 and the intense securitization of Muslim bodies in Canada. Our laws, policies are still focused on this.” As a result, the focus of Muslim communities may often be on ensuring their rights are not violated and therefore they may be unable to focus on issues like environmental philanthropy, suggests Nathani.

Areej Riaz of EnviroMuslims sees that as an immigrant community, “the entire priority becomes about survival and generating enough money and caring for one’s immediate family.” Environmental sustainability is not a priority in this case, in her view. Muaz Nasir of Khaleafa suggests, through his experiences of working with other interfaith groups, this issue of lower prioritization is not unique to Muslim communities in Canada. He observes that newcomer communities typically work more toward establishing themselves in Canada, building facilities and institutions to congregate and worship. It takes time for programming such as environmental conservation and sustainability to become part of the ethos of these organizations.

Muneeb Nasir, of the Olive Tree Foundation, had immigrated to Canada as a young adult and has been in Toronto since 1973. He views that “for the younger generation, it’s an uphill task because they are trying to bring the Muslim community with them. They’re trying to bring the Muslims along and be representative within the wider society.” Aadil Nathani of Green Ummah, who is

a second-generation Muslim Canadian lawyer, made a similar point that “not all leaders within the Muslim community prioritize environmental causes. However, the newer generation leaders have a different kind of future mind-set.” According to Nathani, sometimes the messaging of issues related to environmentalism in the mosque may be disconnected, and it needs to be pushed up on the priority list in mosques.

Abdussalam Nakua, who holds a doctorate in chemistry and is a member of the Muslim Association of Canada’s Executive team and serves on the board of directors for the Ontario Nonprofit Network (see Appendix A), brought a different perspective. Nakua suggests that it is not that the previous generation doesn’t want to prioritize environmental issues, but brought the perspective of consequential events. He underscored that while environmental philanthropy is an important aspect of the Islamic faith, the community has been focussed on developing institutions and building an integrated presence within the community, which has distracted them from being able to focus on environmental issues. As the Muslim communities are growing and attaining reasonable levels of social and economic mobility within Canadian society, there is a notable increase in focus on environmental issues now along with a focus on youth climate justice actions, which is encouraging younger generations across the board, not just a particular community, to become more environmentally engaged. This is also coupled with a generally increased focus on environmental issues by the wider society. With pioneering generations of Muslim immigrants to Canada laying the foundation of developing spaces and institutions that could nurture the Muslim Canadian identity, second- and third-generation Canadians have been able to focus more resources toward developing practices of environmental philanthropy. Recognizing this interrelationship among the generations of Muslim Canadians supports healthy growth and deepening the practices of environmental philanthropy.

Indigenous Relations

Every single participant spoke about the need to focus on the connection of Muslim and Indigenous community relations. Organizations such as Green Ummah, EnviroMuslims, Khaleafa, and the Muslim Association of Canada have started to host events featuring conversations on Indigenous-Muslim relations as well as exploring topics in climate change and learning about the land through Indigenous teachings.

Some participants provided a deeper analysis of this connection. Muaz Nasir of Khaleafa shared, “Muslims are starting to become more aware of the First Generations in North America, and the connection of Indigenous Peoples to the Earth.” Dawood Zwink (see Appendix A), who has served in various roles within Muslim organizations in Canada, played a key role in the establishment of the joint agreement between Turtle Lodge and the Muslim community. Zwink passionately insists on the importance of supporting Indigenous struggles for justice. He believes this is an important aspect of each Muslim’s spiritual obligation in holding oneself accountable to Allah. Whether one becomes an activist, speaks out, or simply rejects social injustices in Canada in their heart,

engagement on these issues is both an individual and collective community obligation. Fostering relationships with Indigenous people, communities, and nations in this northern part of Turtle Island is arguably the highest priority for Muslims along with learning and internalizing the basic principles and obligations of Islam, he emphasizes. Dawood Zwick and Muaz Nasir both acknowledged the similarities between core principles in Islam and the Seven Sacred Laws of the Anishinabwe Tradition: respect, love, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility, and truth. They both shared how these similarities resonate with Islamic principles and need to be instrumental in building relations between the Muslim and Indigenous communities of Canada. They also suggest that building relations on these commonalities will also help to build a stronger understanding and relationship with the land and further engage in acts of environmental philanthropy, as this is integrally tied to the identity of Indigenous peoples and is an important principle within Islamic teachings.

Participating and Advocating for Inclusion of Multiple Narratives in Mainstream Dialogue

While they brought slightly different perspectives, Abdussalam Nakua, Areej Riaz, and Jasser Auda spoke about the need for the Islamic narrative on the environment to be part of mainstream dialogue. Abdussalam Nakua of MAC focused on the historical and ethical context by which Islam understands and acts on environmental issues. He mentions the centrality of principles of preservation and Earth sanctuaries in Islam. He further explains how this is seen in the protection of the Kaaba in Makkah and how the concept of preservation and protection of the Earth in and of itself are a means of worship and extension of mercy toward the creation of Allah. This is connected to an understanding that every living part of the Earth is part of communities, just as human communities. Nakua mentions that this is a unique perspective on why environmental issues must be prioritized and Muslims have a lot to offer to the mainstream conversation on environmental issues. Akin to Nakua's perspective on how Islam brings unique perspectives to the mainstream conversation, Jasser Auda draws on his Islamic knowledge and speaks about how principles of environmental philanthropy are deeply connected within Islam as a form of worship, and thus environmental philanthropy is defined by an ethical context grounded in worship of Allah. This way of perceiving and acting on environmental issues enriches the Canadian context, and Muslims have a lot to offer to the wider dialogue of environmental issues through such an ethical framework

Areej Riaz of EnviroMuslims speaks about the need for marginalized communities to see themselves reflected within educational resources on conservation. As a significant minority group within Canada, Muslim Canadian narratives and experiences must be accounted for when creating opportunities for a connection to nature, which can foster environmental actions. As research has identified, diversifying perspectives beyond dominating Western paradigms can profoundly influence outcomes and how conservation issues are addressed (Duc Bo Massey et al., 2021). Research shows that minority communities can have stronger community-oriented cultures, and a community-oriented cultural shift

within environmental and conservation scholarship can have downstream impacts on future generations of such knowledge frameworks (Duc Bo Massey et al., 2021).

Recommendations

Reflections on Next Steps and Areas of Focus for Environmental Philanthropy for Muslims in Canada

Participants were asked about their recommendations on areas of focus for Muslims in Canada regarding environmental philanthropy. Participant responses fell within the areas of environmental literacy, messaging practices, and partnerships. They provided rationale for why these areas need focus.

As each participant brought perspectives unique to the work and organizations they serve, it was interesting that the overall theme within their recommendations fell within the realm of education. While Muneeb Nasir of the Olive Tree Foundation argues that the Muslim community is still at the stage of awareness building, Islamic scholar Jasser Auda adds that awareness building is connected to the Muslim community's own process of developing a Canadian understanding of Islam, where the priorities and issues within a Canadian context are reflected in the way Muslims who come from a diverse set of backgrounds and experiences come to live within a shared Canadian society. Auda asserts that from an Islamic perspective, the issue of the environment is a serious issue and feels that it will inform the Canadian Islamic context as Muslims in Canada continue to develop their identity. Climate change issues are a corruption of the Earth, identifies Jasser Auda. In his evaluation, "we must re-educate Muslims about the priorities and conceptual framework of the Qur'an." Aadil Nathani of Green Ummah also highlights the idea of developing the Canadian Islamic narrative such that "the messaging has to be adopted" by the leaders of Muslim communities who will help the Muslim community to internalize the teachings. Muneeb Nasir agrees with this point, as he states, "it's about delivering the message and identifying community leaders within the Muslim community who can deliver intelligent messages at the pulpit. Shelina Jessa of the Eco Board also stresses the pulpit as being integral, as she claims that while there are a lot of avenues of messaging, "when the message comes from the pulpit, it has an immense impact and holds a different weight."

Participants shared that collaborative work at the grassroots level where community values are aligned is important. This type of collaboration is important both within the Muslim community and with external partners, including faith groups, political leadership, other minority groups, or mainstream environmental groups. Most participants explained that this is needed because environment-related issues are a platform that many communities can come together on, given the shared concern for the Earth. Muaz Nasir of Khaleafa claims that there has been an increased focus by Canadian non-Muslim organizations on the importance of diverse representation within the environmental movement that this can open doors for important partnerships and is something important for the Muslim community to engage in. He also suggests

how the philanthropy sector is now recognizing the important role faith-based groups play in impacting change in environmental work, and as such there are greater opportunities in seeking grants, which the Muslim community is beginning to explore and should continue to do so.

Aadil Nathani from Green Ummah supported Muaz's point on joint and collective efforts toward environmental philanthropy because the issue of the Earth is one that connects all humans and shares the concern that "we won't have a world to live in if we don't address this issue together and a lot of this comes back to how Indigenous people have been living on Turtle Island and taking care of Turtle Island." Finally, Abdussalam Nakua from the Muslim Association of Canada as well as Canadian Islamic scholar Jasser Auda focused on the role Muslim Canadians can play in using the Islamic principles of understanding environmental philanthropy to contribute to the larger Canadian context. An Islamic eco-consciousness is one that validates the emotions, interactive communities, and sacredness of the Earth, and this drives actions of empathy, love, and respect of the Earth, outlines Jasser Auda. This is also tied to the importance of advocating for the broader Canadian society to incorporate multiple voices, faces, and narratives within outdoor spaces, environmental action, and Earth-based experiences.

Conclusion

As a community that is representative of many layers of diversity, Muslim Canadian practices of environmental philanthropy have emerged within the past decade, with several new organizations and initiatives developing simultaneously recently. This paper has explored the way environmental philanthropy is understood by Muslim Canadian environmental activists and its implications on individual, organizational, grassroots, and collaborative initiatives that are currently happening across Canada. While there is still a lot that needs to be done, Muslims in Canada are starting to actively think about and engage in action to respond to the climate change crisis.

Participants have provided insights on how they have developed practices, barriers to development, as well as recommendations for consideration within the coming years. This paper has covered defining key concepts, an introduction to 10 Muslim Canadian organizations or individuals active in environmental philanthropy, and an exploration of the key elements of an Islamic perspective of environmental philanthropy. The interviews have highlighted the themes of building awareness, intergenerational work, Indigenous relations, and advocating and including multiple narratives in the mainstream narrative on environmental philanthropy in Canada.

As youth-activist Jana Jandal Alrifai reflects on the importance of building community and grassroots action in addressing climate change issues, she says:

We are different, we come from different places, have different thoughts and ideas. And for us as Muslim Canadians, these ideas (of environmental philanthropy) are stemmed in our belief that we have the duty to do right, by our people and by the Earth. We have a duty, and we also have a great opportunity to participate in environmental activism and to

participate in these kinds of conversations, not just at the very basic level because of how it impacts us, but to create change in a positive way that impacts the future of all creation.

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Appendix A: An Overview of the Organizations and Individuals Interviewed

Participants held different roles within either environmentally focused Muslim NGOs, broader national Muslim NGOs, or a Muslim endowment trust organization. Their specific roles varied from serving on the board of directors, working within the executive team, cofounding Muslim Canadian environmental NGOs, developing an online Muslim environmental resource platform, volunteering to organize various green initiatives within mosques, to working with Muslim-majority newcomer communities where green initiatives were introduced. Some individuals have also been actively involved in engaging with Indigenous communities in Canada on common goals toward land protection. Participant interviews are organized in alphabetical order below. It should also be noted that the information and specific roles of individuals are current as of the time of interviewing individuals in 2020 and 2021.

EnviroMuslims

EnviroMuslims is a volunteer-driven community organization launched in 2019 with a focus to engage, educate, and empower the Canadian Muslim community to embed sustainability in their everyday lives through physical and online platforms. They have hosted community tree-planting events, community clean-up events, clothing swap events, and environmentally themed book clubs in partnership with other groups. They have also hosted Ramadan challenges that encourage participants to complete environmentally responsible actions for each day of Ramadan. They are currently working on a multi-phase “Greening the Canadian Mosque” campaign engaging the community in facilitating mosques to champion sustainability. In 2021, they hosted a creative writing competition funded through a local grant that welcomed youth to submit written pieces on climate change crisis-related emotions such as eco-anxiety and eco-grief. They have worked on storytelling events with the Jane Goodall Institute to create and publish an illustrated ebook. EnviroMuslim’s social media campaigns include a Green Ambassadors program that highlights sustainability champions on social media along with an “Eid ul-Adha in Nature” (Eid ul-Adha is one of two major celebrations within the Islamic tradition) photo contest that encouraged participants to submit photos of how they spent Eid (while staying safe during the pandemic) in nature.

EnviroMuslims are in the process of launching a “how-to” series where videos will educate the Muslim community on various sustainability-related topics including planting a herb garden, creating a compost pile at home, and being an eco-conscious consumer, among others. These videos will feature members from the Muslim community leading the knowledge transfer in the videos. All the work of EnviroMuslims is achieved through a base of volunteers, funded through community grants and multiple partnerships across both Muslim and non-Muslim Canadian organizations and foundations along with volunteers contributing to cover some minor costs.

Green Ummah

Green Ummah is a nonprofit organization that was launched in 2020 with the goal of creating a green movement in the Canadian Muslim community (Green Ummah, 2021). Their board of directors is comprised of six young Muslim-Canadian students and professionals, including an Imam who is a research director at Yaqeen (solid conviction) Institute for Islamic Research. Their initiatives include Ramadan campaigns (Green Ummah, 2021) that share practical tips on being mindful and practicing sustainable behaviors during the month of Ramadan.

Green Ummah has partnered with Nature Canada's NatureHood Program to develop a curriculum resource that provides educators with a toolbox to teach Muslim youth about sustainability and Islam within a Canadian context. Green Ummah recently launched the first Muslim-run environmental conference in Canada. The conference was a digital event focused on carving a space to discuss how to integrate inclusivity, allyship, intersectionality, and community-building within the environmental movement in Canada (Sharp, 2021). Green Ummah is a volunteer-driven organization where community partnerships and grants both from the Muslim and non-Muslim community support their projects.

Indigenous-Muslim Relations

While no single Muslim entity or organization claimed to be solely devoted to developing relations between the Indigenous and Muslim communities in Canada, several, including EnviroMuslims, Green Ummah, Khaleafa, Muslim Association of Canada, Olive Tree Foundation, and the Muslim Association of Canada, have been involved in initiatives related to connecting with and building relationships with Indigenous communities, as they saw a direct correlation between Indigenous ways of connecting to the land and their own environmental work. To this end, along with the perspectives of these organizations and their work on Indigenous relations, an individual who has been specifically focused on several initiatives related to building Muslim-Indigenous relations was interviewed. In 2009 and 2010, members of the Muslim community in Ontario worked with Turtle Lodge International Centre for Indigenous Education and Wellness to develop and finalize the "Agreement of Kii Zhay Otti Zi Win and Ukhuwa – an agreement of the Spirit of Friendship, Kindness, Brotherhood/Sisterhood, sharing and gentleness between Turtle Lodge and Muslims Communities in Canada" (Nasir, 2010). A few of the individuals who participated in developing this agreement were interviewed, including Muneeb Nasir and Dawood Zwink. Dawood has built a strong relationship with Turtle Lodge International Centre for Indigenous Education and Wellness.

Islamic Scholar, Jasser Auda

A Canadian Islamic scholar of legal theory who serves as an executive member of the *Fiqh* Council of North America, a member of the European Council for Fatwa and Research, a visiting professor at Carleton University's Centre for the Study of Islam, and a lecturer of Islam and its laws was interviewed. Jasser Auda is the President of Maqasid Institute, which is a global

think tank focused on understanding the practice of Islam through the higher objectives of Islam based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. Jasser Auda was interviewed for his perspectives as an Islamic scholar who contextualizes the understanding and practise of Islam within a Canadian academic as well as community experience.

Khaleafa

Khaleafa started in 2011. Khaleafa is a resource-based organization raising awareness of environmental issues through an Islamic lens (Khaleafa, 2021). The name of the organization was chosen as it is the transliteration of the Arabic word *khalifa*, "It is the Arabic term for steward and represents the sacred responsibility that has been bestowed upon us by Allah" (Khaleafa, 2021). The word is purposefully transliterated in English to include the word leaf within it, to imply the environmental focus of the organization. Khaleafa's work is supported through volunteers who devote their time to the work of the organization.

Khaleafa also runs two regular campaigns: Green Khutbah and Green Ramadan. The Green Khutbah campaign asks that each mosque commit one *khutbah* a year during the week of Earth Day in April on the topic of the environment. A *khutbah* is the Friday sermon (Hashem, 2009) that is delivered during a collective congregational prayer. Since its inception, the annual campaign has been adopted across Canada, the US, the UK, and South Africa.

Khaleafa also leads a Green Ramadan program where information and resources are provided for mosques and the community to educate and inspire Muslims to green their Ramadan by reducing waste and using resources responsibly. Khaleafa also works with mosques to support retrofitting and energy efficient lighting options and educating and accessing the right resources to transition to these fixtures.

Muslim Association of Canada

The Muslim Association of Canada (MAC) was founded in 1997 and has served communities across Canada for nearly 25 years. MAC is currently established in 13 cities across Canada. MAC is a grassroots organization that operates both through volunteers and employees. MAC schools and local chapters have regularly participated in tree-planting initiatives within various cities (Reforest London, 2013; Muslim Association of Canada, 2021). MAC mosques and centers have been participating in delivering green *khutbahs* for several years (Khaleafa, 2021). MAC was part of the development meetings and discussions of the Indigenous-Muslim agreement of sisterhood/brotherhood in 2010 and has also hosted Indigenous blanket ceremonies within its centers (see below). MAC has engaged in interfaith dialogue on reflecting on faith-based teachings as they relate to the environment and environmental stewardship. MAC also runs a national scouts program that has run in various chapters for over ten years since the late 2000s (Muslim Association of Canada, 2021). These initiatives have been running through various cities in Canada.

The Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat of Toronto's Eco Committee

The Eco Committee of the Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat of Toronto was founded in 2013. A group of women started a grassroots initiative of slowly eliminating styrofoam and converting to reusable and compostable dishes. The team worked at the grassroots level as well as at lobbying to establish an Eco Committee within the center. Today, the center is using only compostable or reusable dishes and cutlery. They have developed a steady stream of dedicated volunteers who also work on training other centers and have become a model center for other faith groups to learn from. In 2019, the Eco Committee received the York Region Sustainability award for their work with waste management efforts with a congregation of their size (Climate Wise Business Network, 2019). The entire team and work of the Eco Committee is purposefully run by volunteers as they view philanthropy to be a strong value embedded within their environmental work.

In 2019, they also initiated an “Ecochampions of JCC” initiative that is similar to the “Humans of New York” concept, where a new person would be highlighted who was engaging in actions related to care for the environment. In the spring of 2021, they introduced a gardening from home program during the pandemic, where participants are meeting weekly to sow, grow, and nurture the growth of seedlings leading into Ramadan as a reflective practice.

The Olive Tree Foundation

The Olive Tree Foundation was founded in 2004. The foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the establishment of waqf (endowment funds) and responsible grant making in Canada (Olive Tree, 2021). For 2020, the grant priority areas were anti-racism, climate action, Indigenous work, and countering Islamophobia. In 2020, the Olive Tree Foundation funded the Greening Canadian Mosques project, which was granted to faith and the common good in partnership with EnviroMuslims (Olive Tree, 2021). In addition to providing grants, the Olive Tree Foundation also works to connect organizations and causes on the ground, in the community.

Youth Climate Activist, Jana Jandal Alrifai

Jana Jandal Alrifai is a 17-year-old Syrian-Canadian youth climate activist based out of Windsor, Ontario, who was interviewed. Jana is the vice-president of the Windsor-Essex Youth Climate Council. She organizes climate strikes in her local school and helped cofound a Fridays for Future chapter in her local city of Windsor, where she organizes regular climate strikes. She also participated as a Syrian-Canadian representative to the Mock COP26 Global event that was a reaction to the cancellation of COP26 during COVID-19 closures (Hossain, 2020). The Conference of the Parties (COP) within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate change is an annual event where countries from around the world convene to collectively develop strategies to develop action on climate change. COP26 would have been the 26th annual meeting for

2020. However, this was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, youth from around the world convened on a virtual platform to discuss the issue of climate change and the vision of young people from around the world and recommendations for COP26 in November 2021 (Mock COP 26, 2020).